

## **“The Indian Who Bombed Berlin”: German Encounters in Ralph Salisbury’s Work – Modulating Modern Precariousness**

CATHY COVELL WAEGNER

Ralph Salisbury’s canon is laced with encounters with Germans and Germany, serving to lend his stories and autobiography, *So Far, So Good* (2013),<sup>1</sup> a transnational edginess in connection with his self-identification as Native American. At times the Germans are presented as the dangerously inimical Other, although Salisbury’s or his narrators’ realizations of inclusive human kinship generally undercut the jeopardy and alienation. Salisbury spent extended time in Germany in many capacities, including Fulbright Fellow (1983, 2004, 2005) and networking sojourner, and writes of his experiences there ranging from dealing with a formidable East German guard at Checkpoint Charlie to joy in teaching enthusiastic students Native American literature. In his autobiography Salisbury refers to his many German American neighbors and the Wessels family of his mother’s first husband—themselves dealing with issues of otherness in patriotic America—in (in)direct confrontation with his alcohol-troubled and frequently violent “English-Cherokee-Shawnee father” (*So Far, So Good* 5). In the semi-autobiographical tall tale “The Chicken Affliction and a Man of God”<sup>2</sup> Salisbury changes his Irish American mother’s heritage to German American descent for the boy-focalizer’s mother, re-dressing—in Faulkneresque Southern modernist manner—his underlying boyhood trauma with humorous-grotesque exaggerations when the young narrator’s staunch mother futilely attempts to protect the boy from his abusive father. Salisbury shows literary kinship with other modernist writers in the short story “Silver Mercedes and Big Blue Buick: An Indian War”; a Babbitt-like shoe-store owner, who could possibly have felt at home in Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street*, conducts

---

a Hemingway-flavored gender battle with his Sioux German-descended wife, as well as a perilous driving contest with a skilled Mercedes driver on narrow Bavarian roads. In "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin," a Native American exchange professor recalls his callous wartime destruction of enemy "cathedrals and homes" in Germany (202), but finds himself constantly, transculturally, and ironically readjusting his lines of affiliation during a riotous demonstration by students of color in Berlin. Modulating modernism to produce a "Cherokee modern" approach, Salisbury's complex instrumentalization of Native American and German stereotypes and the accompanying issues of precariousness, alterity, agency, and reinforcement of Indigenous presence can be compared to and contrasted with strategies employed by two Anishinaabe authors in different genres and literary modes: Gerald Vizenor's in *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel* (2014) and Drew Hayden Taylor's in *The Berlin Blues*, a 2007 play.

This essay will first consider Ralph Salisbury's (auto)biography in terms of *precariousness*—the violation of basic physical and psychological needs in childhood, the alterity and shakiness of his family's ethnic identity, wartime hazards in dangerous training missions, and his existential precariousness through his pacifist and anti-racist counter-stand—and the way it interweaves with his exposure to (images of) Germans and Germany. This precariousness will then be related to *risk* as a key component of modernism and Salisbury's modulation of this into "Cherokee modern" in an individualistic knitting together of autobiography and fiction to support agency and Indigenous presence, often with self-directed irony. Three sections subsequently examine a trio of Salisbury's short stories: The first, *Translating Biography to Literature: Tall Tale Strategies*, offers a relevant reading of "The Chicken Affliction and a Man of God"; the second, focusing on the fourfold combat in "Silver Mercedes and Big Blue Buick: An Indian War," creates a surprising amalgamation of conflicts in German traffic; the final section of analysis of Salisbury's fiction demonstrates how "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin" evokes

ethical agency as a possible route for transnational restorative justice. I continue with some ideas on the ways Vizenor's Native protagonists in *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel* employ stereotypes as weapons against German soldiers in wartime precariousness. Taylor's *The Berlin Blues* returns the discussion back to a largely comic tall-tale contest, this time between two sets of ethnic stereotypes within a frame of mimicry and hegemonic European re-colonialization. My concluding paragraphs can be read as suggesting reasons why Salisbury, the "Cherokee humanist and Indigenous cosmopolitan" (Krupat 73), chose to end his autobiography with a comparison of the natural music of trumpeter swans, no longer threatened by extinction, to Beethoven's symphonies (*So Far, So Good* 273-4).

### **Biographical German Encounters**

Ralph Salisbury (1926-2017) grew up in a rural area near Arlington, Iowa, attending school with mostly German American children (*So Far, So Good* 20). Although Ralph's father Charles (Charley) did not ever tell his family or community directly that he was of Native descent ("he never, so far as I can remember, said that we were Indian – and never said that we were not," 39-40), young Ralph sensed that his family was treated as different, for example when "a spiteful, possibly racist neighbor" turned his father in to the authorities for hunting out of season (58). Supportive connections with neighbors, especially through his Irish American mother, are also described, however. Her first husband Bernard Wessels, father of Ralph's revered, eight years older, half-brother Bob, was German American. Wessels died after enlisting during World War I: "the American army may have been a way of transcending his bearing a German name... His was a sad and not unusual story, death from meningitis in a Texas training camp" (*So Far, So Good* 139). The Wessels family did not approve of their son's enlisting, nor of his marriage to an Irish American woman (241). Salisbury vividly remembers how Wessels remained a thorny

---

"presence... in my parents' quarrels" ("The Quiet" 25). Not without empathy, Salisbury depicts his own father's overcompensation for alterity through the images of the family barn and Charley's clothing: "I'd see our barn, the only white one among the dozens of red—symbolic, maybe, of a Southern-born mixed-blood Indian man's urge to be of the dominant race, the same urge that moved him to wear his one suit, a white shirt, and a necktie when going to town" (27). The English surname did not tend to serve the family well, we are told: "Our English name was not advantageous, whether our German American neighbors knew we were Indian or did not" (70). Indeed, in a tavern frequented by local German Americans, Charley's "urge to be of the dominant race" put him in jeopardy in a brawl: "During World War II a group of drunks threatened my father in a tavern, not as an Indian but as 'a goddamned Englishman.' An older German American present restrained the would-be attackers by telling them, 'Charley is a good Englishman'" (70). The motif of aggressive and discriminatory German behavior, balanced by broad-minded interactions of good will, accompanies the reader of Ralph Salisbury's autobiography and stories.

Teenage Ralph learned to believe that physical fighting was necessary for survival as he "grew to manhood in a community like most, where men have to fight to get respect" (154). Salisbury was deeply influenced by what he called "the lynch-mob anger that the entire country had been feeling since a deluge of propaganda against Japan, Germany, and Italy had begun" (125). His half-brother Bob fought the Nazis in North Africa and was a maltreated prisoner of war in Italy, and Salisbury recalls how he "had wanted to kill his captors, the Germans, who'd been so evil in the official history books of twelve years of state schools" (175). Newspapers and movies aroused his desire to be a warrior when he "experienced orgasm-resembling release in seeing British Spitfires' gun-camera film of Nazi bombers bursting into flames in newsreels" (125). At age sixteen he painstakingly attempted to build a fighter-glider out of strips of sawed-up boards, binder twine, and farm

---

fertilizer bags in a material "labor of abstract hate" (126). In his later years, Salisbury's dream of flying a glider was finally fulfilled, but his memorable flight in "a graceful, German-designed glider" was tempered by his stark recollection of the war dead: "I remember that my cousin Stacy was killed while piloting a glider carrying troops in the invasion of Normandy" (128). Salisbury's adult explanation of the rise of Hitler, near the beginning of his memoirs, places fault mainly on institutionalized propaganda:

From the depths of humiliation and near-starvation imposed by England, France, and the United States, Germany, united under Hitler's dictatorship, emerged prosperous and proud. Ceaselessly propagandized, the German population felt moved to be led on and on, to greater victories, greater glory. (13)

The mature autobiographer sees through the web of propaganda—on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific—to the machinations driven by greed for material and territorial wealth, by stereotypical hate and misdirected patriotism, encouraging the "craziness of nations, which were daily slaughtering thousands of our own kind in war" (126).

When did the fiery young Ralph, would-be "Cherokee warrior, movie dream hero" (134), grow disillusioned with the "propagandization" that demonized the German people? Salisbury carefully records the ethnic discrimination he personally experienced or observed after enlisting at age seventeen in the army air corps. His not-immediately-identifiable ethnicity (or that of the recruits he befriended) led to verbal abuse attack as "spik," "Hispanic," or "dago" (141; 172; 151). Ralph buddied up with Jewish trainees, "on the basis of... some vaguely sensed community of pariah-hood," and was mistaken for a Jew (148). The irony of preparing to fight in Europe "to save... Jews from Nazis" but having to "watch Jew-hating training sergeants mistreat [American] Jews" did not escape the young trainee (124). There had only been one black family in Salisbury's home territory, and he was incensed

---

by the segregation and blatant discrimination directed toward African American soldiers in training camp (86).

The many dangerous training missions the air corps recruits were sent on, made all the more hazardous by faulty equipment, poor preparation, and infelicitous weather conditions, gave Salisbury a sense of perilous combat. As he told interviewer Bo Schöler in 1985, "I never engaged in bombing an enemy city, but a lot of my comrades died in airplane disasters... probably a hundred that we lost during the two-and-a-half years I was flying" (Schöler 28). When Specialist Gunner Salisbury heard about a training plane needlessly bombing cattle and a Navajo home, ostensibly to have a live target (150), he meditated on stages and incidents in the genocide of Native Americans by the settler colonials and their military, a genocide resulting in "eight million Native Americans [being] wiped out"—even more than the approximately six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust by the German Nazi organization (150). Salisbury did not actually serve abroad in World War II, since his orders for deployment to Europe were changed to retraining with the large B-29 Superfortress for bombing duty in the Far East. The war ended before this training was completed. Corporal Salisbury firmly decided not to serve in active duty for any war, and later encouraged his son Brian to register as a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War (75).

Ralph Salisbury's professional career as a college teacher and university professor was strongly linked to post-war Germany. His first trip to Germany took place in 1967 following a sabbatical year in London from the University of Oregon. He purchased a VW bus in Hannover, traveled to Berlin and later Munich (email from Ingrid Wendt, 23 Jan. 2019), and must have been keenly aware of the burgeoning of German student demonstrations for peace in Vietnam and a restructuring of university and social systems. At any rate, Salisbury's experience at Checkpoint Charlie between West Berlin and Communist East Berlin showed him the "workings of a police state" (*So Far, So Good* 209), when two men—unwisely

---

arrogant in their interaction with a border guard—were detained behind closed doors. Salisbury and his four companions, one a former colleague from Drake College in Des Moines, Iowa, continued on to a museum in East Berlin to see Greek artworks that were as displaced as prisoners of war or migrants, “looted from Greece by Germany, then looted from Germany by Russians, and then ransomed back by the East German government” (201). Salisbury surmises that the Southern American accent of one of his companions attracted the negative attention of four young men, who menaced the five tourists, musing that perhaps the accent “had reminded the four of Lyndon Johnson’s voice talking about his invasion of Vietnam, or perhaps they had had some personal experience with Southern-born American soldiers before the Russians took over” (210). Ironically, the nearby presence of uniformed museum guards discouraged the Communist harassers, and the danger became one more tale in the dense network of threats—from his father, from intruders on the farm, from school bullies, from officers, from suspicious strangers—that Salisbury faces down in his autobiography.

A second encounter at Checkpoint Charlie in 1983, during a semester as a Senior Fulbright Fellow at Goethe University in Frankfurt, reinforced this pattern of stern and helpful guards in East Berlin and is embedded in an important accolade of thanks to all who have assisted him during his long lifetime. A strict East German border guard noticed that Salisbury had not signed his passport:

Jet-lagged and exhausted after weeks of little sleep while I’d worked to read the final projects of the young poets and fiction writers who were my students, I stupidly reached into my coat for a pen and simultaneously reached to take the passport back from the East German border guard... At the tense East German border, where many had been killed while trying to escape to the West, I escaped trouble because a kindly young soldier – as young as the young soldier I’d once been – took a worried look at his officer, then far down the line of Americans being detained, and told me to wait and sign the

---

passport after I was safely back on the bus. I never studied German and can only converse haltingly and ungrammatically, but I understood the young guard as well as I've understood any poem I've memorized. The German word for "thanks" I knew but could not say, for fear of getting the guard and myself in trouble. (183)

Salisbury returned to Germany repeatedly. In addition to a Eurail trip with his wife Ingrid Wendt and their four-year-old daughter March-August in 1976, Salisbury stayed in later years in Munich and Murnau, tracing with his wife her family history in Hamburg, Cologne, Wiesbaden, and the Stuttgart area (email from Ingrid Wendt, 17 Jan. 2019). Moreover, Salisbury taught classes on contemporary Native American literature at Goethe University while Ingrid Wendt served as a Fulbright Fellow there between 1994 and 1995, accompanying her to poetry-teaching workshops in ten German cities. Furthermore, Salisbury taught literature and history courses at the University of Freiburg in 2004 and 2005 as a Fulbright Specialist. Immersed in an extensive network of German colleagues and close friends, the strong husband and wife team made at least six other trips to Europe between 1983 and 2005 to take part in international conferences and to travel in Germany and beyond. There can be no doubt that Ralph Salisbury's transnational experiences in Germany were intensely important personally, academically, and literarily.<sup>3</sup>

### **Precariousness and Cherokee Modern**

The concept of precariousness has taken on particular importance in current cultural discourse, not least through Judith Butler's post-9/11 collection of philosophical-political essays *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004). Her stance against "corporations that monopolize control over the mainstream media with strong interests in maintaining US military power" (147), consonant with Salisbury's, leads her to inquire what makes some human lives "ungrievable" (xiv and passim). An alterity of pernicious discrimination, Butler asserts, plays a key role



---

in the distinction between humanization and dehumanization of war dead, whereby “the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human” (xv). Butler claims that this deep form of exclusion stabilizes a world order that supports a hierarchy of injurious othering in spheres of nationalism, ethnicity, gender, and class. Butler recommends Emmanuel Levinas’ visionary call for an awareness of a salutary kind of alterity, of “*Peace as awakesness to the precariousness of the other*” (Butler 134, my emphasis).<sup>4</sup> I maintain that Salisbury’s statements and literature provide evidence that he would agree with this philosophical application of precariousness and alterity, with its agenda of moving toward political peace in postmodern times. Salisbury recounts his own “appalled” reaction to 9/11 in terms of the German civilian war-other, with both sides thoroughly “propagandized”: “I watched the TV coverage of the airplane’s gracefully turning to complete its suicide mission, and I was appalled, remembering my propagandized eighteen-year-old’s training to inflict massacre on the propagandized populations of German cities in World War Two” (Mackay 15).

Two further recent applications of precariousness—with respect to isolation and placelessness—arise from precepts of modernism and its “riskiness” (to be discussed below) and have relevance for Salisbury’s life-writing and fiction. In a 2018 volume titled *New Perspectives on Community and the Modernist Subject*, the editors seek to refocus the traditional image of the “solipsistic and isolated modernist individual” by placing its interiority into contexts of “communal affiliations,” many of which are “non-conventional and non-essentialised external forms” (Rodríguez-Salas et al. 1-2). This approach would revalue the protagonist’s tentative and “precarious” connections to others and “show that many modernist narratives are built on the tension between organic, traditional and essential communities, on the one hand, and precarious, intermittent and non-identitary

ones, on the other" (7). For Salisbury, biographically, this could perhaps offer context for an interview statement that speaks to a stronger "non-conventional" affiliation to Germans than to an essentialized form of "pan-Nativeness"; "I suppose," Salisbury reflects, "that maybe I might have more in common with a German than I would have with a Navajo in many important cases" (Schöler 32). A fictional example of the "tension" in established vs. precarious communities will follow in the discussion of "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin."

In *Postcolonial Modernism and the Picaresque Novel: Literatures of Precarity* (2017) Jens Elze links the traditional wandering picaro figures with the economically jeopardized underclass members of what he labels "postcolonial modernist" narratives. Both groups "combine an existential precariousness with an economic precarity that is condensed in the picaresque's traditional propensity to 'atopy' – a social placelessness in terms of genealogy and aspiration – that will serve as its main category of differentiation from the Bildungsroman" (25). As a Native postcolonial traveler and unsettler preferring "non-conventional" affiliations, Salisbury could qualify as a picaro in his life-writing; but his insistence on the wholeness of his identity—as "a Cherokee-Shawnee-English-Irish person, not part this part that but all everything, whatever it is" (*So Far, So Good* 242)—alongside his website's statement of his transnational *Bildung*, where he explains "I have lived and worked among the intelligentsia of many nations" ("Ralph Salisbury"), counters Elze's "placelessness in terms of genealogy and aspiration." Salisbury is thus able to, as it were, have the precarious modernist cake and eat it too.

Salisbury recorded his admiration of numerous modernist authors, citing his teacher Robert Lowell's strong influence (Schöler 31), calling Ernest Hemingway his "hero" (*So Far, So Good* 190), quoting Robert Frost's advice (184), praising Flannery O'Connor's late modernist art (185), and evoking William Faulkner with whom he shared the inclination to "hunt and peck," meaning writing slowly to encourage thinking (186), as well as the dubious honor of being called "nigger lover" by local

---

Southern citizens (applied to Salisbury living in Bryan, Texas, and teaching at Texas A&M University 192). Salisbury also attests to weighty bonding with Faulkner through the latter's valuation of Native Americans: "It was a white writer, William Faulkner, who first gave me a sense of the sanctity of my Indian heritage. Faulkner's character Sam Fathers, 'son of a slave and a Chickasaw chief,' became my spirit father" ("The Quiet" 25).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Salisbury sees a bond between the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Southern modernists and Native American authors. "Like Faulkner and other southern white writers, Native American writers write from a conquered people's awareness" ("The Quiet" 34), creating innovative literature that challenges received conventions and "since the United States' shattering defeat by tiny Vietnam" takes on "a new importance to contemporary readers" (34).

A well-known scholar of modernism, Michael Levenson, stresses the *risk* (6, my emphasis) taken by daring authors following what has come to be considered the modernist credo of "make it new" in their literary art. A number of them faced the physical perils of war, and all of them the philosophical terrors of alienation, cultural fragmentation, and a profound sense of loss. We could venture to say, though, that few, if any, of the Anglo-American canonical modernists were confronted with the task of subsistence-level survival, combatting poverty, malnutrition, and violence (in the family, with peers, and in the community) to the extent that Salisbury was. However, the current transnational, even global, perspective on modernism admits many authors from disadvantaged colonial backgrounds—and this could include Native Americans—who indeed battled with such threats. In an encyclopedic article on Indigenous modernism, the University of Oregon scholar Kirby Brown convincingly demonstrates that the expanded "New Modernist Studies has an 'Indian problem,'" largely neglecting Native American authors (289). He resoundingly sets the record straight, presenting significant Native American writers of various genres and media, male and female, based in precarious "Indian Country" (294) or urban centers, whose work lies in the high

---

modernism period of 1910s to 1930s, as well as recent critical publications that successfully offer new contexts for Native American literature within American modernism. On the temporal axis, Salisbury's publications move beyond the core period of modernism, placed as 1890-1945 by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz in their influential article "The New Modernist Studies" (738). That being said, Mark Wollaeger, the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012), would assure us that these dates are not exclusive, particularly in postcolonial domains: "It is the persistence of conceptual affinities and various formal preoccupations that makes the identification of instances of modernism outside the temporal core both possible and increasingly uncontroversial" (13). Nevertheless, despite certain "conceptual affinities and various formal preoccupations" of global family resemblance that Salisbury might share with the modernists, his approach does not fit entirely comfortably with theirs.

Perhaps a decisive note of difference to the modernists in Ralph Salisbury's adult life and work lies in his adoption of agency. Biographically, he chose not to serve in the Korean War; he did not let threats of lynching deter him from teaching racial equality at Texas A&M University; he unswervingly and vociferously criticized the hegemonic and capitalist support of military ventures; he sought to travel and work in former enemy countries such as Germany and Italy; he deliberately proclaimed his hybrid Native ancestry in contrast to his father, who attempted to pass as Anglo-European in his Iowa family and community. Even as an adolescent, Salisbury valiantly chose agency at an early pivotal point in his maturation, successfully challenging his father to stop shooting at his mother:

I did something. I tried to change my life, to change the deadly fear of submitting to overwhelming violence, overwhelming force. Today I do not expect immediate results, in the world around me or in the formation of what people call my character, but by act or by word I try to change what seems to need changing. (94)

Through his proactive espousal of multifaceted risk in reality and in fiction, Salisbury possibly moves beyond a modernist weltanschauung of shoring fragments against the ruins<sup>6</sup> to a stance that can broadly be labeled—as in the shorthand title of this volume—“modern,” specifically “Cherokee modern”: experimental, hazardous, and audaciously ethical.

### **Translating Biography to Literature: Tall Tale Strategies**

Ralph Salisbury’s autobiography returns again and again to the precarious parameters of his childhood, to chronic hunger, illness, dangers in nature and from intruders, near drowning, hostile peers, drive-by shooting, “my parents’ undeclared war” (163), and above all violence perpetrated by his unpredictable father Charley. The traumatic memory of his intoxicated father shooting a rough circle in the floor around four-year-old Ralph’s bare feet becomes a meme in *So Far, So Good* that is repeated and woven into many descriptions of jeopardy in war, travel, or professional life. The extended meme is described in full when Ralph has a further threshold experience of initiation into adulthood. He begs his father to let him fend off a potentially dangerous intruder in the family barn loft with Charley’s pistol:

My father regarded his middle son in the glow of a coon-hunting lantern. “All right,” he decided, a father whose own father had deserted him. “All right. You take my pistol.” The pistol with which he’d defended himself and defended our family several times. The pistol with which he’d shot a ring around my bare feet when I was three or four. The pistol that had sent bullet after bullet past my head when I was ten and moving, though terrified, to plead for my mother’s life... [T]hat time [in the dark barn] was a rite of passage into manhood. I’d measured up and won the respect of a father who’d often made me feel unvalued, unloved... Three years later an atomic bomb turned my dreams of warrior manhood into shadows burned onto a concrete wall. (137-8)

---

The fear and emotional pain of his father's pistol attack on the barefooted child is foregrounded in a number of Salisbury's short stories, but one story, "The Chicken Affliction and a Man of God," chooses the genre of the tall tale to assuage this fear and pain, not least through the support of the German American mother of the focalizer boy, Juke. A sequence of stories in *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin* collection features the protagonist brothers Juke (Jukiah) and Parm, whose names derive from Salisbury's Cherokee Shawnee relatives two generations older (cf. *So Far, So Good* 40). The youths' experiences, however, are fictionalized versions of Ralph's and his brothers'.<sup>7</sup> Salisbury's mother was actually Irish American, so why did he choose to change the ethnicity of the stalwart, long-suffering mother in the Juke and Parm story-sequence? One explanation lies in the contrast and comparison present in "The Chicken Affliction" between the father's inebriated reliving of his World War I confrontations with German soldiers and his struggles with his German American wife, who is in solidarity with "most of their [community and its God]" (139). He returns home from his drinking sprees "cussing and screaming and shooting at Germans as dead as doornails already and not attacking anybody for years" (137), only to face his wife's calling up a religious "Force a whole lot stronger than Hitler and all those other dead Nazis put together" (137).

Salisbury remembers his biographical father as a talented tale-teller and reconstitutes some of his father's stories in *So Far, So Good*. Charley, born and raised in the "hills of Kentucky" (115), is voiced in dialect, relating family tales of danger with outrageous imagery in hyperbolic action or contests. Charley's account of his son Ralph being struck by lightning and then running from further strikes provides a cogent example:

"Lightning left us as blind as hogs in the whiskey mash a minute or two, and then we seen Ralph jump up from where he's been throwed. He ran hell bent for election, sloshed through the slough, ran up to the next fence, backed off

a dozen steps or so, and ran again and slid like one of them baseyball players on his belly through mud under the bottom barbed wire." (266)

Intertextually, the narrative voice in "The Chicken Affliction" could be heard as a third-person overlaying of father Charley's recounting from *So Far, So Good* with that of the son Juke's, the quasi-fictional observer-participant.

The structure of the tall tale generally encompasses entangling contests between con men, often between braggarts and understaters. The hyperbolic rhetoric of the braggart usually leads to his being overtopped by the superiority of the understating *eiron*, with the boasting *alazon* ending as a fool.<sup>8</sup> In "The Chicken Affliction," Juke's religiously teetotaling mother sets out to trick his alcoholic, nonbelieving, and choleric father (the tellingly named Dirk Dark Cloud) into sobriety by having the local priest, Father O'Mara, arrive at their home Sunday noon when Dirk will be returning from a drunken Saturday night out. Ma, at least temporarily, loses this framing contest when her husband—mostly silent except for curses—ignores the priest's elaborate remonstrations and fires a pistol around the priest's feet: "dust spurted up between shiny shoes, and spurted again and again as the old man skipped backward" (143). The immediate competition between Father O'Mara and Dark Cloud is given image by their respective cars. The former's is a gleaming Lincoln sedan with "immaculate paint," and the latter's a "fender-frayed" pick-up truck covered with "mud, dust, and rust" (138-40). The contest is temporarily decided by the priest's foolishness. He up-ends Dirk's whisky bottle over the "ex-oil-barrel trash burner," starting a fire that scorches his "white hair, combed forward over a receding hairline" but leaves his "eyebrows still as white as little arcs of springtime's last snow" (142). The hellfire with which Father O'Mara threatened the "once-a-month drunken Indian" seems to attack and ridicule the priest himself (141).<sup>9</sup>

In order to present the small boy Juke as witness and indirect reporter of the action, Salisbury cleverly depicts him as rooted in place by the contests unfolding,

---

unable to run away even though his mother persistently warns him to vanish: "Don't let [your father] see you" (139). The narrative voice interprets this sentence for the reader in a psychological reading of Dirk's Native precariousness; we are told that Juke's Ma means "Don't let your dark eyes and skin remind your crazy drunk dad of his own half-breed generation's hunger and cold" (139). The tall-tale humor is radically undercut by the nine-year-old boy's fear when he does finally move, attracting his irate father's attention. Juke dodges the bullets zooming past him and heads to the hills behind the farmhouse. The narrative voice describes his flight, not without bitter irony, in terms of the cliché of the Doomed Native American: "Not yet ten, and not ready to accept his mortal destiny, Juke, a Vanishing American, ran, hoping to vanish temporarily and escape permanently vanishing" (144). The thunder that has accompanied the shots gives way to a hailstorm, and Juke hovers among bushes in the freezing dark while comic restitution, engineered by Ma, plays out in the farmhouse kitchen. Dirk, now sobering up, Father O'Mara, and the sheriff (whom Ma has summoned) companionably eat several helpings of Ma's stewed chicken and Dirk's favorite dish, Cherokee dumplings. Shut out of this warm resolution, the son re-experiences his father's "half-breed generation's hunger and cold," continuing the inherited pain and precariousness.

Salisbury's application of the stereotypes and dynamics of the tall tale invites a juxtaposition with some of Southern Modernist William Faulkner's stories. In them the device of boy narrator/participant is frequently used with moving and ironic effect to reflect the imperfections and (comic) struggles of the adult world. In "Shingles for the Lord," the first-person narrator remains loyal to his father even as "Pap" bargains away his son's beloved dog in a complicated effort to overtop his neighbors and ends up accidentally setting the local church on fire. The boy's "Maw" knows how to take care of, dust off without judgment, and finally boost up her foolishly stubborn husband and is the understating winner of the subtle contest between her and Pap. With regard to hyperbolic imagery, Father O'Mara's



eyebrows "as white as little arcs of springtime's last snow" in Salisbury's story intertextually compete with those of formidable Minister Whitfield in "Shingles for the Lord" whose eyebrows look "like a big, iron-gray caterpillar lying along the edge of a cliff" (41). In Salisbury's "Chicken Affliction," Ma's chickens provide a cartoon-like sequence; their coop destroyed when Dirk drunkenly drives into it, they constantly fly into the pick-up through one open window and are hurled out the other by Dirk, accompanied by both his cursing them as "Raven Mockers, the Cherokee witch-birds of his nightmares" (140) and his attempts to free himself from a growing pile of "smothering feathers" (139). The swirling, dangerous ponies of Faulkner's "Spotted Horses" provide moments of similar comic-book imagery in the dialect of tale-teller Ratliff's account:

Then [the Texas horse trader] jumped into the [cluster of cornered horses], and we couldn't see nothing for a while because of the dust. It was a big cloud of it, and them blare-eyed, spotted things swoaring out it twenty foot to a jump, in forty directions without counting up... Then it was all dust again, and we couldn't see nothing but spotted hide and mane, and that ere Texas man's boot-heels like a couple of walnuts on two strings, and after a while that two-gallon hat come sailing out like a fat old hen crossing a fence. (168-9)

The Texas horseman and his partner, the master-trader Flem Snopes, hoodwink nearly the entire hamlet of Frenchman's Bend into purchasing these violent horses, becoming, as narrative touchstone Mrs. Littlejohn proclaims, "them fool men" (174). The horse-swapping humor is undermined by debilitating injuries and the searing financial depletion to the poorest in the community, who, like poverty-stricken Henry Armstid, have succumbed to their own greed and pride in wanting to take advantage of a bold bargain. The modernist sense of loss and human frailty emerges in most of Faulkner's stories, even his tall tales. In Salisbury's "Chicken Affliction," German-descended Ma's daily recurring struggle, "ministering to her

war-damaged husband and to her war-damaged children" (145), implies less a sense of loss than a possibly more postmodern view on Salisbury's part. Only critique of, or change in, the master narratives of hegemonic contestation that lead to the recurrence of brutalizing war on (inter)national levels can allow harmony and respect within the family.

### **Stereotypes and Intertwining Indian Wars on German Roads**

In an adjustment of the tall-tale stereotypes and strategies of "The Chicken Affliction," the short story "Silver Mercedes and Big Blue Buick: An Indian War" places the focalizing third-person narrator on tour in Germany. There, we find him fighting a gender battle with his Native-descended wife encoded within a contest between a sleek Mercedes and an outsized American Buick on the narrow roads of the Bavarian countryside (The detailed description of the traffic, with bicycles crisscrossing among the high-speed cars, attests, in my judgment, to Salisbury's first-hand experience of driving on German roads.) Mac Mackenzie, the frustrated businessman from New Ulm, Iowa, and his wife Dorotea Weiss, who is of Sioux and German descent, have traveled to Germany at Dorotea's behest to improve their unsatisfactory marriage. She has always denied her Sioux heritage, favoring the German side, but Mac seems only to have been interested in her past beauty-contest victories and her role in furthering the image of his business ventures, not her choice between "Crazy Horse or Crazy Hitler" affiliations (44). He worries constantly about her graying hair and growing lack of attention to her clothing, and he insults her repeatedly with the epithet "crazy bitch" (49, 52). Mac would easily fit into one of Sinclair Lewis' modernist, satirical novels of small-town, small-minded America, despite his international experience and his potential familiarity with Indigenous communities. The superficiality of his traveling is revealed when he spends far more time ogling German waitresses, "as pretty as cheerleaders," (45) at various locations than he does grasping concentration-camp exhibits when he

---

casually passes through Dachau “for a quick looksee” (45). In fact, he views flourishing Germany and the arrogant Mercedes drivers as proof that World War II was “no more than a fraternity-party scuffle, everything was hunky-dory again” (50).

The contest in womanizing, materialistic Mac’s failed marital relationship is barely satirically humorous, however. Neither is his recollection of his wartime experiences killing enemy soldiers in Germany, where he entered as “a conqueror... with cannon, and with prick... the same way his English great-great-great-grandpappy had entered the New World” (42-3). His driving competition with the skilled and enviable Mercedes driver—the German man’s arm firmly placed around an attractive young female passenger—lends itself more readily to modern tall-tale humor, though not without imagery of threat. The description of the “silver-haired” driver hyperbolically combines war and new-wealth imagery, his “sunglasses as round as double-barreled shotgun muzzles aimed forward” (50).

The escalation of tension between the traveling couple in Hemingway’s short story “Hills Like White Elephants” can be found in Salisbury’s “Silver Mercedes and Big Blue Buick” too, but rather than the minimalist dialogue in Hemingway’s story that revolves around the unspoken secret of the (dark-skinned?) woman Jig’s socially transgressive pregnancy, the exchanges between Mac and Dorotea grow increasingly explicitly insulting and verbally cruel, especially with regard to the reasons for their childless marriage. A secret is suddenly aired: In the moment the Buick crashes into a bike-rider, Tea confesses to Mac that she is terminally ill, showing in her rhetoric of stereotypes that she has seen through his social façade of decency:

“I’m not young anymore,” she sobbed against his chest. “My looks were all you cared about, and nine months, six, five, then you’ll be free of your old worn-out squaw, free to have all the sex you want, and it won’t matter one iota. To you I’m already as dead as my babies are.” (51)

In a split-second flash, Mac continues to spin out the pejorative stereotypes, imagining his life following her death and ascent to a "German-Lutheran heaven," including insurance money, remarriage to a youthful woman, a son who is a "100 percent white American boy," and relief "not to have to go on pampering Tea through old age, his hard-earned home her personal Indian reservation." He would not marry "another not-quite-vanished Vanishing American – all that bottled-up hate about stuff so long ago nobody could remember" (52).

With an ironic twist, Tea manages to upstage him, ending his daydreams as she embraces her double heritage and arouses the German passersby's sympathy in a semi-frieze. "The girl [the bike rider hit by the Buick] put her head on Tea's shoulder," Salisbury writes, "and Tea, her dark face all but buried in blond hair, began to sob" (52). The witnessing Germans donate money to replace the girl's ruined bike. In the end, "crying like a goddamned fool" (52), Mac realizes he is overtopped—in the driving contest, his relationship, and in his interaction with Germans. Thus a complex fourfold-intertwining "Indian war," as the title of the story has it, evolves: Buick vs. Mercedes; the marital battle including the fight over control of the Buick, which results in the accident with the bike rider; Americans vs. Germans in World War II and the present; and the ethnic and physical struggle within Dorotea.

### **Testing Affiliations: "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin"**

In the short story "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin," Salisbury deviously and powerfully weaves components of his biography—teaching students at German universities in numerous time periods, for example—within a fictionalized past of fire-bombing cities in Germany during World War II; an imagined diegetic present of becoming a victim during a rough demonstration by Arabic youths in the Berlin metropolis during the (anti-American) protest years of the late 60s or 70s; plus a narratorial flash-forward to the 90s, after the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan. The first-

---

person narrator's pleasure in fulfilling the terms of his academic grant "To Further International Understanding" (202) by teaching German university students "who were admirably fluent in English" and "most of them strongly egalitarian" (202-3), as well as his enjoyment in acknowledging the ancient cobblestones and fortress walls (cf. 204, 206), alternate with memories of his having viewed German cities at a cold distance, from maps or bomber planes as "puzzle patterns of tiny city blocks glimpsed through clouds, and through clouds of smoke" (202). During the war he had not contemplated "the devastation of cathedrals and homes, not only in big prime target cities but in small secondary targets" (202). Above all he had failed to consider the "men's, women's, and children's lives" that he extinguished as a bombardier (206).<sup>10</sup> The moment the demonstrating "Near East and Middle East" students throw him from a historic bridge, "which I and other bombardiers had failed to destroy," the narrator experiences an ironic *déjà vu*, "for the second time in my life flying above the bridge – this time not thousands of feet above, but just enough to clear the low stone railing" (205).

Ethnic critique that emerges in the story is directed toward the American and English soldiers rather than the German or Arabic/Turkish-speaking students. The small-statured narrator must endure racist epithets such as "Tonto" and "Red Nigger" dished out by his larger pilot, both soldiers being "Yanks" in Britain during the war years (201). Particularly perfidious is a British colleague, a bomber during the war, at the German university, who feels that the narrator has wrested the former's "Writing for Stage and Screen" class away from him. The British playwright threatens to report the narrator for his "redskin wog's subversive blather" (203), including the "redskin" narrator's expression of "doubt that Hitler could have gained power had not Germans been suffering from enemy-imposed hunger" (203). The British adversary apparently deliberately betrays the narrator as American to the angry "dark-skinned demonstrators" (204) on the streets while the narrator is walking on his way to teach. In his university classes, the Native narrator had

believed that he "got on especially well with the sons and daughters of Turkish workers, who'd been recruited for jobs in Germany but not been given German citizenship" (204), but in the mob-like demonstration his attempt to show solidarity, shouting "WOGS OF THE WORLD UNITE!" (205), fails miserably. The professor's established community with his students of all ethnicities does not extend to the exceedingly precarious one with the dark-hued demonstrators. He envisions his father's "brown face" several times during the ordeal, but this connection also fails to lend him an effective strategy. Even his Native "war whoop" (205) does not help in the grotesque escalation, which is saved from tragedy by the narrator's self-ironic view of his predicament, ending with him "lecturing, barefoot," muddled but uninjured, in his classroom "that had housed American occupation troops" (206). For the demonstrators, however, he remained a "Satan American! Murderer!" (204).

In the epilogue to the story the narrator admits that this epithet of "murderer" does indeed fit him. The events have at least furthered his own international and self-understanding. He evokes ethical agency as a possible route for restorative justice, observing "I can try to make my own life, and those of others, somewhat better – can still try to change injustice to justice, still try to keep our species' suicidal tantrums from rendering us all extinct" (206).

### ***Blue Ravens: Stereotypes as Weapons in Wartime Precariousness***

The trickster tactics of the narrator of "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin"—his shout of solidarity as a "wog," his war whoop—prove to be of no avail in a crisis situation. This is different in Gerald Vizenor's *Blue Ravens*, wherein the Anishinaabe protagonist-brothers, writer Basile Beaulieu and painter of blue ravens Aloysius Beaulieu, find themselves in brutal trench warfare in the Europe of World War I. Vizenor draws on his own relatives' participation in overseas combat, and his employment of trickster tropes arises, we can presume, more from the rich Anishinaabe trickster tradition which segues productively into postmodern

---

literature, than the con-man topos of the tall tale, despite morphological connections of structure. On a meta-level, as Vizenor explains elsewhere, "The trickster is agonistic imagination and aggressive liberation, a 'doing' in narrative points of view and outside the imposed structures" ("A Postmodern Introduction" 13); like the postmodern author, the trickster "animates... human adaptation in a comic language game" (14). Both the author of *Blue Ravens* and the clever Beaulieu brothers use "agonistic imagination" and "adaptation" in the narratives they activate of Natives involved in a war between hegemonic powers. The survival tricksterism practiced by Basile and Aloysius in their combat with German soldiers is particularly successful because it also relies on a very different and specific source of stereotype: the extremely popular "Indian" adventure novels of Karl May, published in the 1890s in German and read avidly by successive generations of German youth. May claimed to have experienced the encounters with Native Americans that he wrote about, but in fact the con-man author drew on questionable secondary sources and his own fantasy to create his ferocious scalpers and noble savages. Winnetou is the best known of the latter, loyally protecting his brave German blood-brother, Old Shatterhand, from all Native enemies. Birgit Däwes and Kristina Baudemann have recently published a special-issue volume, addressed principally to teachers in Europe, that attests to the continued prevalence of the stark Karl May stereotypes among German pupils' images of Native Americans.<sup>11</sup>

In wartime scenes in *Blue Ravens*, Sergeant Sorek forces the White Earth Anishinaabe brothers into a clever instrumentalization of stereotypical "Indian" roles. The sergeant, who might have watched the earliest films in the emerging western genre, "was not romantic but he was convinced that stealth was in our blood, a native trait and natural sense of direction even on a dark and rainy night in a strange place" (121), and, in a kind of double finesse, the brothers' strategies even fulfill this stereotype. Worthy of a Native trickster tale, their "first night of stealth and surveillance in the rain was solemn but only conceivable in a shaman

---

story" (121). They use assumed Native skills of establishing oneness with nature to detect alien movements and they locomote like animals: "Aloysius lowered his head and moved in the smart spirit of an animal, sudden leaps, lurches, and slithers on his belly... Native hunters moved in the same way" (130-31). Aloysius carefully applies warpaint, which in the Native artist's ironic protest becomes a "comic mask" (129) with the shapes and colors of a Chagall work. Ferociously wielding his pocket knife, the gentle painter Aloysius exploits the stereotype of the savage Native warrior to overcome, capture, and, during mission after "risky" mission (121 and passim), even kill young German "Boche" (121) soldiers frozen into fear by the anticipation of being painfully tortured or summarily scalped, no doubt remembering the gruesome cruelty of the wild Comanche warriors in Karl May's books. The brothers are extraordinarily successful scouts after their first mission in which they were captured by two even cleverer Oneida scouts from a different squadron. The dark humor of the brothers' grotesque-ironic situation is overshadowed by the deadliness of the hands-on contact of World War I: "We were native scouts in a nightmare, a curse of war duty to capture the enemy" (130).

The brothers enter Germany in the Army of Occupation, quartered on the 5,000-year-old defensive site of the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress on the Rhine and Mosel rivers overlooking Koblenz, originally a Roman city, one of the oldest in Germany. They travel several times by steamboat down the Rhine River, a classic tourist activity, but the sight of starving civilians continues the brothers' experience of the horrors of war: "Yes, we had survived the war as scouts and brothers, a painter and a writer, but were unnerved by the wounds and agonies of peace" (143-4). The Treaty of Versailles "became a tortured tongue of grievous reparations and vengeance" (144), a seed for later renewed war. The brothers have no stereotypes or paradigms to mediate the self-destruction of an ancient culture and its contemporary descendants; the Euro-American settler society's genocidal attempts to destroy Native peoples and cultures through violence and false treaties could be



viewed as an inverse precedent. The Anishinaabe brothers rely instead, modernist-style, on their renewing, visionary art of Native presence. After their time in the Army of Occupation in Koblenz, Basile tells us, "my literary scenes were more fierce and poetic, and the images my brother created were more intense and visionary" (144). Back home, however, they discover that their war efforts, insights, and art have not changed their status with regard to sovereignty, as "The native soldiers who were once the military occupiers had returned to the ironic situation of the occupied on a federal reservation" (175).<sup>12</sup>

The Anishinaabe brothers' empathy for the occupied in post-World War I Germany echoes that of the Native narrator in Salisbury's "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin," who maintains that (among other factors) the Germans' "suffering from enemy-imposed hunger" (203) led them to invest in Hitler's promises of economic success. In "The Chicken Affliction," Dirk Dark Cloud's hyperbolic "cussing and screaming and shooting at Germans as dead as doornails already" (137) masks the literal and emotional "hunger and cold" (139) of his "war-damaged" Native self (145). Thus, to use a slantedly appropriate military metaphor, Vizenor and Salisbury 'join forces' in imagining a precarious, "non-identitary" (Rodríguez-Salas et al. 7) community of those wounded by war and hegemonic ambitions in both the "Old" and "New" Worlds.

### ***The Berlin Blues: Unsettling Farce***

Drew Hayden Taylor, who calls himself a "blue-eyed Ojibway,"<sup>13</sup> envisions, as a farce, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century recolonization of a First Nations Anishinaabe/Ojibway community by German entrepreneurs deeply influenced by their adolescent reading of gripping Karl May novels. In his comic play *The Berlin Blues*, he depicts efficient but naïve and humorless Germans, Birgit Heinze and Reinhart Reinholz, as wannabe-"Indians," economically and ideologically taking over the (fictive) Otter Lake Reserve in Canada with the plan of establishing "OjibwayWorld," an Anishinaabe

---

theme park. The residents of the Reserve have far less knowledge of their own culture and Indigenous language than the Germans. Birgit and Reinhart speak Ojibway phrases, for instance, but the Natives cannot follow them. Reinhart points out that "there is no word in Ojibway for goodbye. Or for hell," and Otter Lake resident Trailer Noah can only show astonishment: "Really! I didn't know that. (to [Band administrator] DONALDA) Did you know that?" (16-17). Most of the residents are impressed by the Germans' knowledge and know-how, and willingly participate in setting up a giant laser dreamcatcher, a white water kayak run, Crazy Horse pony rides, bumper canoes, a facsimile of the Rocky Mountains, Sitting Bull Steak House, and "Dances With Wolves – The Musical," complete with a large herd of imported buffalo on stage. No German stereotypes are omitted, it seems. When the buffalo stampede and destroy the theme park before the Grand Opening, Birgit calmly consults her "Aboriginal theme park emergency manual" (83). Taylor stresses both the "delight" and the "outrage" that his play has evoked, "showcas[ing] contemporary stereotypes of First Nations people, including a fair number of these that originate from Indigenous communities themselves, to the often outraged delight of... international audiences" ("Drew Hayden Taylor"). The irony in his prefatory Acknowledgements in the printed play suggests that his hilarious comedy has outgroup barbs directed at Germans: "And I suppose I should thank all the German people out there who have a special place in their hearts for Winnitou [sic] and all other native related things. This is my special homage to you" (*Berlin Blues* 5). Taylor has also recently created a documentary film called "Searching For Winnetou" (CBC, January 2018), which he describes on his website as "Drew's quest to understand the roots of the German obsession with Native North Americans" ("Drew Hayden Taylor"). Elsewhere, Hartmut Lutz has coined the term "Indianthusiasm" to describe this undifferentiated and thus deleterious German obsession (23).

We could read the play as a tall-tale contest between two sets of ethnic stereotypes, German vs. Native. But that would oversimplify the way the German characters adopt or discuss in their own stereotypical manner what they consider traditional Native customs, and the way that the Natives joke about (and also activate) those same clichés. When Birgit first meets long unemployed Trailer, who has lived in a gritty trailer for decades, she asks him, "Trailer... hmm, is your name indicative of your Aboriginal heritage? Possibly because you are such a good tracker and trailer of deer and other such animals? That is why you are called Trailer?" Trailer responds deviously, "Yeah. That's me" (16). The line between stereotype and real-world condition is blurred: The Germans offer to build a wellness center to counter the unhealthy obesity of many Reserve dwellers, for instance, and this is broadly welcomed by the characters in the play, even Angie. A Native woman who grew up in a city and has only lived on the Reserve for five years (and sells toy canoes to tourists), Angie views the theme park venture, with the exception of the much-needed wellness center, as culturally lethal. She warns that "OjibwayWorld is not the world of the Ojibways. It's some genetically modified, bastardized, hybrid, freak show" (61). With that pronouncement, the long history of "freak shows" and western movies exoticizing, stereotyping, affixing, and demeaning Native American and First Nations peoples opens up for the viewer. Daniel Heath Justice begins his watermark study, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018), by elaborating on the way stereotyping imposed by outside groups serves to create an image of "Indigenous deficiency" (2). The German entrepreneurs' appropriation of what they consider "Indian" activities and artifacts—including wearing Native-themed t-shirts (21), collecting beaded vests and porcupine quill boxes (41), greeting the morning sun (59), as well as teaching the Reserve's residents how to make proper pemmican (53)—might seem merely whimsical, but in fact this inverted postcolonial mimicry serves to show the Europeans' presumptuous sense of superiority—and their opportunism. The largely playful postmodern farce *Berlin Blues* with its ridiculous

hegemonic recolonization indeed reveals deep crevices in cross-cultural esteem. As Salisbury has also vividly shown in "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin," in his own way, the "International Understanding" championed by such undertakings as the ambitious and praiseworthy Fulbright two-way exchange program remains work in progress.

### **Alterity, Agency, and Ethics**

Biographically, Salisbury saw his Fulbright mission as performing academic and ethnic double-duty: "I have been invited abroad to work, as a professor and as an American Indian writer carrying on in the Oral Tradition by presenting his work" (Mackay 15). Welcoming the Euro-German interest in his Native American identity and in the public readings of his multi-layered prose and poetry, a 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>-century realization of an "Oral Tradition," was not dissonant with his self-described unity of hyphenated identity. Salisbury did not display a modernist distrust of obtaining wholeness in the forging of his identity, nor modernism's tendency, in a kind of inverse alterity, to privilege non-traditional artistic achievers. In a 2009 portrait, Arnold Krupat praises Salisbury's postmodern feat of espousing *both/and* rather than the exclusionary *either/or*, "the ways in which Ralph Salisbury continues to model the traditional and modern (postmodern, if you will) roles of the poet as Cherokee humanist and Indigenous cosmopolitan. Marked by deep roots and varied routes – he has read and taught in Italy, England, Norway, Germany, and India" (73).

The optimism of the firmly grounded ethics expounded by this "Cherokee humanist" is not infrequently imperiled in Salisbury's short stories. War, economic-institutional machines, and mob thinking might seem too omnipotent for the individual to influence them, but succumbing is never entertained as a long-term option.<sup>14</sup> Salisbury is, however, honest in his presentation of hurdles. With regard to his Native identity, which was reinforced by his father Charley's sustainable

---

techniques for farming, hunting, and masterly tale-telling,<sup>15</sup> in conjunction with Salisbury's own direct contact with his father's Native relatives and their lore in Kentucky, Salisbury calls himself "his immediate family's last-ditch Indian survivor," knowing that his own children and grandchildren "don't feel Indian... having grown up geographically removed from any Cherokee influence other than my own" (*So Far, So Good* 241). He admits that he has not always followed his own advice as an "elder" (265) to novice Native writers to

write of what you have lived or have witnessed. Don't let the conquerors' whims turn you into a tourist-grade museum exhibit... I too have slid into the trap I've warned of, trying to give some substance to my Indian people's past and thus sometimes taking others' laboriously arrived at scholarly suppositions and turning them into fiction. (241-2)

This is clearly not the case with his stories of German encounter, however, which refract his own experiences and blend his concerns as a "Cherokee humanist" and an "Indigenous cosmopolitan." Salisbury's lived Native culture is passed on through his literary works, his teaching, and his transcultural interactions; it melds with the flourishing Indigenous presence locally and globally, physically and literarily. In his later years Salisbury moved beyond personal precariousness to productive awareness, feeling free, as he indicates to his readers, to joyously and unconventionally entangle the distinctive calling of no-longer-endangered trumpeter swans, migrating in large flocks over his Oregon home, with Beethoven's sophisticated symphonic compositions ("Epilogue", *So Far, So Good* 273-4). Ralph Salisbury's embracing of *both/and* leads to an enlightened international contentment: "It's a good day to live, here where I am now, in Germany, a nation divided among conquerors, now becoming one nation again after massive destruction, oppressive occupation. It is a good day to live, a seminar in Memory and the Native American Tradition for me to meet this afternoon" (251).

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Work by Ralph Salisbury used by permission of The Literary Estate of Ralph Salisbury. Copyright © 2020 by The Literary Estate of Ralph Salisbury. All Rights Reserved. No reproduction without permission of the estate.

<sup>2</sup> This story and the two others mentioned in my introductory paragraph are found in *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin*, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> In a 1987 autobiographical sketch, Salisbury recounts in detail the strikingly transnational genesis of his poem "Cherokee Ghost Story: My Father's". He recalls how "[a]bout a month after I'd returned from an intensely meaningful few days of talking with Scholer [sic: Schöler] and others in Denmark [about, among other things, an autographical story my father told me], I spent a long afternoon exchanging knowledge with Bernd Peyer, the German-Swiss scholar who had set in motion the correspondence which culminated in Dr. Martin Christadler's inviting me to teach in Germany. Talking with Bernd brought back the intense feelings I'd had in Denmark; and before I left my desk at the university that day, my father's story had migrated through Time and Space, from his youth in Kentucky, through my childhood in Iowa, by way of Denmark and Germany, onto a sheet of paper, and after some months of revision the poem made its way back to the southeastern U.S., where it – and my father – had originated, the poem published in *A Negative Capability*, printed in Alabama in 1984" ("The Quiet" 22).

<sup>4</sup> Butler quotes from Levinas' essay "Peace and Proximity" (first published in 1984).

<sup>5</sup> As inspiring as Sam Fathers is in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha world, he illustrates—according to Louis Owens—the modernist "Chief Doom School" of literature with regard to Native Americans (Owens 81-2), Sam Fathers being the last of his vanishing line and people.

<sup>6</sup> The original version of this phrase is the fourth-to-last line of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922): "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" describes the role of the modernist artist.

<sup>7</sup> The nine Juke and/or Parm Dark Cloud stories make up *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin's* Part Three, titled "All in the Family: Some Vanishing American Military Histories" (119-90). The reader is specifically told that Juke's and Parm's mother is German American on p. 122 of the first story, "A Vanishing American's First Struggles against Vanishing." Reviewer Eric Wayne Dickey is not entirely correct in implying a steady maturation of the protagonists in the entire story collection of *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin*, but his point about the "uncertain and painful victory in Berlin" of the adult narrator is well taken. As Dickey puts it, there is "a kind of chronology in the book. Starting with a young boy in elementary school, each protagonist advances in age. Each tale adds to the receding story as Salisbury

---

marches us toward adulthood and onto an uncertain and painful victory in Berlin" (95).

<sup>8</sup> The tall-tale figures and strategies overlap in uncoincidental ways with those in Native tales. In her insightful study (that has perhaps not received the recognition it deserves) *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature: Reimagining Nativeness* (2008), Eva Gruber describes how Native "tricksters are both culture heroes and fools" (95). Gruber also analyzes meta-level "trickster discourse," which I reference in connection with Gerald Vizenor's *Blue Ravens*. Salisbury evokes "Old Man Coyote, the Trickster" in an incident in *So Far, So Good* (164).

<sup>9</sup> The story indicates that the priest has physically abused Native children and is thus not on higher moral ground than Dirk Dark Cloud. Father O'Mara, we are told, had "reportedly slapped [the Indian face] of many a defiant reservation-orphanage child" (143).

<sup>10</sup> In *So Far, So Good* Salisbury shudders at the horrendous damage of the fire-bombing that "had incinerated Dresden, a massacre greater than the ones perpetrated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (174).

<sup>11</sup> See: Däwes and Baudemann, editors, [*Beyond Karl May:*] *Teaching Native Literatures and Cultures in Europe*.

<sup>12</sup> I discuss some of the ideas expressed here in connection with Native protest and the instrumentalization of stereotypes in Waegner 2015 and 2017.

<sup>13</sup> The title of Taylor's 1998 book of humorous essays and columns is *Funny, You Don't Look Like One: Observations from a Blue-Eyed Ojibway*.

<sup>14</sup> Faulkner also displays this discrepancy between rhetorical optimism, as in his much-cited Nobel Prize address, and the overwhelming burden of history and racism encoded in his major novels, at least with regard to some of the main protagonists.

<sup>15</sup> "My father... told Indian hunting stories and taught me to hunt with Indian skill, Indian instinct and taught me... a religious view based on awareness of Creation" ("Some of the Life and Times of Wise-Wolf Salt-Town" 251).

### Works Cited

Brown, Kirby. "American Indian Modernities and New Modernist Studies' 'Indian Problem.'" *Modernism and Native America*, edited by James H. Cox. Special Issue of *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2017, pp. 287-318.

- 
- Butler, Judith Butler. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2004.
- Däwes, Birgit and Kristina Baudemann, editors. [Beyond Karl May:] *Teaching Native Literatures and Cultures in Europe*. Special Issue of *LWU: Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2016.
- Dickey, Eric Wayne. "The Indian Who Bombed Berlin" (review). *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 22, no. 4, Winter 2010, pp. 94-97.
- "Drew Hayden Taylor." <http://www.drewhaydentaylor.com/>. Accessed 15 January 2019.
- Elze, Jens. *Postcolonial Modernism and the Picaresque Novel: Literatures of Precarity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Faulkner William. "Shingles for the Lord." *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. Vintage, 1977, pp. 27-43.
- . "Spotted Horses." *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*, edited by Joseph Blotner, Random House, 1979, pp. 165-183.
- Gruber, Eva. *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature: Reimagining Nateness*. Camden House, 2008.
- Hemingway, Ernest. "Hills Like White Elephants." *The First Forty-Nine Stories*. Jonathan Cape, 1972, pp. 219-223.
- Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2018.
- Krupat, Arnold. "Native Writer Profile: Ralph Salisbury." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 20, no. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 69-77.
- Levenson, Michael, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cambridge UP, 2011.
- Lutz, Hartmut. "Beyond Indianthusiasm, or: Why Teach a Canadian First Nation Author's Text in the EFL-Classroom? – Emma Lee Warrior's 'Compatriots.'" [Beyond Karl May:] *Teaching Native Literatures and Cultures in Europe*,



- 
- edited by Birgit Däwes and Kristina Baudemann. Special Issue of *LWU: Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2016, pp. 21-34.
- Mackay, James. "An Interview with Ralph Salisbury." *Wasafiri*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2017, pp. 12-16.
- Mao, Douglas, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. "The New Modernist Studies." *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 3, 2008, pp. 737-748.
- Owens, Louis. *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*. U of Oklahoma P, 1998.
- "Ralph Salisbury." <http://www.ralphsalisbury.com/>. Accessed 15 January 2019.
- Rodríguez-Salas, Gerardo, Paula Martín-Salván, and María J. López. "Introduction: Who's Afraid of the Modernist Community?" *New Perspectives on Community and the Modernist Subject: Finite, Singular, Exposed*, edited by Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas et al., Routledge, 2018, pp. 1-20.
- Salisbury, Ralph. *The Indian Who Bombed Berlin and Other Stories*. Michigan State UP, 2009.
- . "The Quiet Between Lightning and Thunder" (title in table of contents; title in chapter heading, p. 15: "Between Lightning and Thunder"). *I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers*, edited by Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat. U of Nebraska P, 1987, pp. 15-35.
- . *So Far, So Good*. U of Nebraska P, 2013.
- . "Some of the Life and Times of Wise-Wolf Salt-Town." *Returning the Gift: Poetry and Prose from the First North American Native Writers' Festival*, edited by Joseph Bruchac. U of Arizona P, 1994, pp. 247-252.
- Schöler, Bo. "'... I would save the cat.' An Interview with Ralph Salisbury." *American Studies in Scandinavia*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1985, pp. 27-34.
- Taylor, Drew Hayden. *Berlin Blues*. Talonbooks, 2007.
- Vizenor, Gerald. *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel*. Wesleyan UP, 2014.

---

---. "A Postmodern Introduction." *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literature*, edited by Gerald Vizenor. U of Oklahoma P, 1989, pp. 3-16.

Waegner, Cathy Covell. "Gerald Vizenor's Shimmering Birds in Dialog: (De-)Framing, Memory, and the Totemic in *Favor of Crows* and *Blue Ravens*." *Native American Survivance, Memory, and Futurity: The Gerald Vizenor Continuum*, edited by Birgit Däwes and Alexandra Haucke. Routledge, 2017, pp. 102-116.

---. "Preface." *Mediating Indianness*, edited by Cathy Covell Waegner. Michigan State UP, 2015, pp. ix-xxx.

Wollaeger, Mark, editor, with Matt Eatough. *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*. Oxford UP, 2018.